

To: Administrator/Ex. 6
From: Fritz, Matthew
Sent: Thur 8/6/2015 4:34:15 PM
Subject: Fwd: Gold King Mine Drainage Spill

In effort to avoid surprises

Begin forwarded message:

From: "McGrath, Shaun" <McGrath.Shaun@epa.gov>
Date: August 6, 2015 at 12:29:28 PM EDT
To: "Meiburg, Stan" <Meiburg.Stan@epa.gov>, "Fritz, Matthew" <Fritz.Matthew@epa.gov>, "Reynolds, Thomas" <Reynolds.Thomas@epa.gov>
Subject: Gold King Mine Drainage Spill

Stan, Matt, and Tom,

I want you to be aware of a situation we are managing in the Region – a mine drainage spill that our staff, working with CO state staff, caused. AP called us this morning, and some of the downstream towns/cities (Durango) are not pleased with the response.

Call if you want to discuss.

Shaun

303.31206026

R8 Statement Today

Yesterday an EPA and State Division of Reclamation Mining and Safety team working to investigate and address contamination at the Gold King Mine in San Juan County, Colo. unexpectedly triggered a large release of mine waste water into the upper portions of

Cement Creek. Initial estimates are that the release contained approximately 1M gallons of water that was held behind unconsolidated debris near an abandoned mine portal. There were several workers at the site at the time of the breach, all were unharmed.

The acidic mine water associated with the release contains high levels of sediment and metals. EPA teams are conducting sampling and visual observations today and will be monitoring river conditions over the next several days. The water associated with the release is obvious and highly discolored. EPA recommends that recreational users of the Animas River avoid contact with or use of the river until the pulse of mine water passes.

R8 Statement Yesterday -- Wed

This morning at approximately 10:30 am, an EPA and State Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety team working to investigate and address contamination at the Gold King Mine in San Juan County, Colo. unexpectedly triggered a large release of mine waste water into the upper portions of Cement Creek. Initial estimates are that the release contained approximately 1M gallons of water that was held behind unconsolidated debris near an abandoned mine portal. There were several workers at the site at the time of the breach, all were unharmed.

The primary environmental concern is the pulse of contaminated water containing sediment and metals flowing as an orange-colored discharge downstream through Cement Creek and into the Animas River.

The Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment has notified water users downstream of the release so they can take appropriate steps to turn off intakes until the contaminated water passes. The Town of Silverton does not take water out of the affected portions of Cement Creek. Due to current and longstanding water quality impairment associated with heavy metals there are no fish populations in the Cement Creek watershed and populations in the Animas River have historically been impaired for several miles downstream of Silverton. Over the next several days, EPA teams will be sampling and investigating downstream locations to confirm that the release has passed and poses no additional concerns for aquatic life or water users.

“This unfortunate incident underscores the very reason EPA and the State of Colorado are focused on addressing the environmental risks at abandoned mine sites,” said David Ostrander, director of EPA’s emergency response program in Denver. “We are thankful that the personnel working on this mine cleanup project were unharmed. EPA will be assessing downstream conditions to ensure any impacts and concerns are addressed, as necessary.”





Shaun McGrath

Regional Administrator

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